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Chairperson: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 31: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/64/13 and Add.1, A/64/115, 174, 323 and 324)

1. **Ms. Koning AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing her report (A/64/13 and Add.1), said that the Agency's most immediate challenge was a $12-million shortfall in funds for basic salary and office costs. Barring a contribution in that amount, UNRWA would be unable to pay staff salaries for the rest of the year. A much larger funding gap, of $84 million, remained in the approved regular budget, and would cover the costs of much-needed infrastructural repairs. Despite donor generosity, UNRWA must again appeal for resources to avoid a crippling of vital operations and a compromising of its three-year reform process. Its financial situation stood in sharp contrast to the breadth of global support for the Agency and for Palestine refugees expressed at the high-level event held in September 2009 to commemorate its sixtieth anniversary, which she hoped would galvanize the donor support so desperately needed.

2. The explosion of violence in Gaza that had ushered in the year had cast a shadow over the region. The scale and intensity of Israel's military offensive in Gaza had been unprecedented in the recent history of the conflict. By the time the Israeli Government had declared a ceasefire, 1,387 Palestinians had lost their lives, including 313 children, according to NGO sources, while 13 Israelis had been killed; 50,000 Palestinians had been left homeless and the civilian infrastructure had been damaged. She herself had witnessed some of the attacks and their impact on the civilian population. Throughout, UNRWA, at significant risk to its staff, had led the international community's coordinated response, providing food, shelter and medical care to the displaced people and wounded civilians. UNRWA had moved rapidly to restore its regular services in an effort to bring a semblance of normalcy to a traumatized population, reopening schools, clinics and food-distribution centres within six days of the ceasefire. In recognition of its vital role, a record $250 million in pledges had been received from a wide range of donors, both governmental and non-governmental. The solidarity shown by civil society in the Middle East had been particularly gratifying. The Agency's largest traditional donors, the United States of America and the European Union, had been exceptionally generous, giving a combined total of over $110 million.

3. Of grave concern, however, was the continuing blockade of Gaza's borders, which limited humanitarian access and restricted imports of construction materials needed to rebuild a shattered infrastructure, effectively shutting down the Gazan private sector. The number of refugees classified as abject poor had tripled over the past year to 300,000. Thanks, however, to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, with which UNRWA maintained a good working relationship, UNRWA was now able to import at least some school supplies and receive monthly currency transfers to cover staff salaries, special-hardship-case allowances and the school feeding programme.

4. Pressure was building to modify the policy of isolating Gaza, yet thus far there had been no progress towards an agreement on opening Gaza's borders, even though the civilian infrastructure would remain in ruins until closure was lifted. UNRWA continued to call for the opening of Gaza's crossings, which would require guarantees on security measures for the Israelis and guarantees of operational stability of the crossing points for Palestinians. The longer the blockade of Gaza was maintained, the harsher would be the suffering of its people, the deeper their grievances, and the more radicalized some would become.

5. In the West Bank, the separation barrier and the obstacles and administrative restrictions associated with it prevented the flourishing of a sustainable Palestinian economy. Israeli settlement construction continued and house demolitions and confiscations, notably in East Jerusalem, were regular features of Palestinian life. Notwithstanding recent improvements in economic and security indicators, the West Bank remained splintered — 40 per cent of its land was effectively off-limits to Palestinians — to the point that its viability was deeply compromised. The intricate web of Israeli measures also constrained UNRWA activities by creating continuing obstacles to the movement of staff and goods essential to meet refugee needs, in spite of the improved security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel. UNRWA emergency activities in the West Bank for the over 300,000 refugees there focused on providing temporary employment, along with food and

cash assistance for those in need. Yet while that assistance protected refugees from some of the worst effects of poverty and provided a modest basis for recovery should a peace process gain traction, sadly an unhealthy level of dependency on foreign assistance had been thrust upon Palestinian society, traditionally so self-reliant, enterprising and hard-working.

6. In Lebanon, the level of hardship among refugees was, after Gaza, the highest in the Agency's five areas of operation. The most pressing UNRWA concern was the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp, destroyed in 2007, and the care of 27,000 refugees displaced as a consequence. It was critical for the international community to respond fully to the appeal for the needed funds. There were welcome indications that the new Government intended to build upon past initiatives to improve Palestinian living conditions in Lebanon, while consultations continued with it on access to employment for Palestinians, respect for the human rights of the thousands of Palestine refugees, and improvement of living conditions in the 12 refugee camps.

7. By contrast, in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, the refugees were living in stable and conflict-free environments.

8. In 2008, UNRWA had made solid progress in delivering its regular services to registered refugees in its five fields of operation. Fifty-three per cent of the regular budget went for the education of 481,000 pupils in 684 schools and of almost 6,000 trainees in vocational centres. In the field of health, which absorbed 20 per cent of the regular budget, refugees had been given 9.6 million medical consultations and hospital treatment had risen by 14 per cent. New guidelines, standards and data gathering were enabling UNRWA to better monitor health conditions in the refugee population and respond more effectively.

9. The Agency's three-year Organizational Development initiative to improve its management capacity was beginning to show positive results. A six-year medium-term strategy laid down the blueprint for programmes and field operations beginning in January 2010, based on four major development goals for the Palestine refugees: a long and healthy life, the acquisition of knowledge and skills, a decent standard of living and full human rights. UNRWA would do more to assess where needs were greatest, and prioritize services to meet those needs more effectively. Budget allocations would in future be made on the basis of forecast outcomes, not on programme-based inputs, thus raising the quality of services. At the management level, needs-based planning, monitoring and evaluation had been strengthened and decentralized models of individual accountability had been put in place, together with a restructured and upgraded oversight function. The positive impact of change was already being felt across fields and operations. Bilateral funding under the Organizational Development budget for 14 critical international posts was due to expire at the end of 2009; UNRWA sought the inclusion of those posts in the United Nations programme budget for 2010-2011, in order to consolidate its reform process. She drew attention to the report of an extraordinary meeting of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/64/115) and to its various recommendations, particularly the proposal that the Fifth Committee reconsider the nature and level of funding provided to UNRWA from the United Nations regular budget and the request to the Secretary-General to commission a report on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA. She urged Member States to revisit the funding arrangements made for UNRWA 35 years earlier, in a different era.

10. She informed the Committee that after nine years of service with UNRWA she would be retiring at the end of the year. In the course of a long United Nations career she had witnessed the resolution of a number of protracted refugee situations. In tragic contrast, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained resistant to solution, despite the clarity of what must be involved: an end to occupation, Palestinian self-determination, and security guarantees for both Palestinians and Israelis. A sustainable settlement required all involved — including the refugees — to be consulted. UNRWA was acutely aware, 60 years on, that it was still a temporary agency and that one day, when a negotiated settlement had been reached, it would hand over responsibility to a professional cadre of tens of thousands of Palestinians. Their experience would be its finest legacy.

11. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) paid tribute to the humanity, solidarity, principled position and sense of justice of the Commissioner-General, a true friend of the Palestinian people, who unfortunately was leaving before witnessing the completion of the indispensable work of UNRWA and the birth of the

Palestinian State. It was the collective responsibility of all Member States everywhere to respond immediately to the UNRWA financial emergency and give it the resources it needed to continue operating.

12. He asked the Commissioner-General to elaborate on efforts to persuade Israel to pay compensation for damage to United Nations property and the injury or death of United Nations personnel during its invasion of Gaza, as recommended by the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry. Also, he wondered whether Israel's failure to respond to the proposed initiation of a United Nations project for the reconstruction of Gaza, broached in June, meant that the lifting of the siege was a dead issue.

13. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that Palestine refugees, who were increasingly dependent on UNRWA assistance for their survival, had scant resources with which to purchase the food, clothing, fuel and other essential items needed to see them through the harsh winter months. Materials pledged for the reconstruction of Gaza, where one in six homes had been either wholly or partially destroyed during the Israeli offensive, had not yet arrived at their destination as a result of the ongoing Israeli embargo. He asked what the current situation was in Gaza, what measures UNRWA was taking to prepare for the onset of winter, and what impact there would be on its budget.

14. **Mr. Elsherbini** (Egypt) asked how Israeli measures, notably in Gaza, had affected UNRWA in terms of its activities and the ability to assist Palestine refugees and fulfil its mandate; what the situation was concerning compensation for the damage caused to UNRWA facilities during the Israeli military operations in Gaza and in particular concerning the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry; and, what the implementation status was of agreed projects, especially as winter was approaching.

15. **Ms. Koning AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that the Office of Legal Affairs, which was responsible for the follow-up to the Board of Inquiry report, was holding regular talks with the Israeli mission in New York on the matter of compensation. Also, discussions were still much alive — though detailed and time-consuming — concerning the resumption of projects that had been about to be completed prior to the Gaza conflict, especially those concerned with water and sanitation. The situation was much the same as at the end of January, because no construction material had yet come in to Gaza. UNRWA was trying to move any of the refugees still living in tents or amid rubble into rented housing in the winter months, and had some cash available for that. The impact on the UNRWA budget was much as she had described it: the emergency appeal had had very good results, but the general fund, covering the Agency's basic operational services, was in very bad straits. UNRWA was able to carry on its planned activities — provided it had the money to pay for them — because its good relations with the Israeli Coordinator allowed it to get in food, medicine and supplies where other agencies could not.

16. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) asked whether the Commissioner-General thought that the Israeli restrictions on Gaza amounted to a blockade or siege.

17. **Ms. Koning AbuZayd** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that UNRWA certainly saw the situation as a blockade, as did anyone like herself who was living in Gaza, although she was told that legally it did not amount to a blockade. Everything was closed off. No people or goods could move in or out, and it was a pretty miserable life there.

18. **Mr. Løvold** (Norway), speaking as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introduced the report (A/64/115) on its extraordinary meeting held in June 2009 to assess the adequacy of the resources provided to UNRWA from the regular budget of the United Nations. Despite earlier recommendations by the Working Group, the General Assembly had approved funding for only 6 of 20 new international posts requested by UNRWA for the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 biennia. At the same time, the serious underfunding of its general fund — a shortfall of approximately $84 million in 2009 — made it impossible for the Agency to carry out the management reforms needed to modernize its capacity to utilize funds effectively and provide high levels of programme supervision and reporting. The Working Group had concluded that the real value of the 1974 funding arrangements under which UNRWA was operating had declined and no longer met its needs, creating a management deficit that could no longer be ignored. Over those 35 years, the Agency's tasks and the level of expectations of key stakeholders had grown more complex and challenging. The General Assembly should seize the moment to ensure UNRWA an

appropriate number of international staff and the additional resources it required to complete its reform programme. The Secretary-General himself had endorsed the need to review the existing UNRWA financial arrangements. The Agency's management reform process could serve as a model for other field-based organizations, but the achievements were fragile and could be reversed without adequate funding. The Working Group had therefore asked the Secretary-General to prepare a report on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA as soon as possible, and had recommended that the General Assembly should review the validity of the current UNRWA funding arrangements and assume responsibility for other management costs relating to international staff. Many senior management posts at UNRWA were undergraded, considering the responsibilities they entailed and the difficult operational environment.

19. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine), expressing deep admiration for the Commissioner-General's dedicated leadership of UNRWA and her principled commitment to the Palestine refugees, and commending the Agency for its many initiatives on its 60th anniversary to raise further awareness of the Palestine refugees and the work of UNRWA, said that the Palestine refugees and their descendants — now numbering nearly 4.7 million and constituting more than half of the Palestinian population — continued, tragically, to live as a stateless and dispossessed people, denied their right to return to their homes and to just compensation for their losses and suffering. The Palestine refugee problem had to be resolved in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions before there could be a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given the regional dimension of the refugee problem and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

20. The Palestine refugees, particularly those living in camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in the besieged Gaza Strip, were struggling to survive a dire humanitarian crisis and constant affronts to their human rights safety and welfare, including ruthless measures of collective punishment. The continued intransigence of Israel, which was persisting in its violations of international law, had been shockingly reaffirmed by the brutal military onslaught launched against the Gaza Strip in December 2008. At the same time, Israel's inhumane blockade was punishing the entire population of Gaza, forcing them to live in misery amid the ruins of their homes and communities and further inflaming feelings of injustice. The wanton destruction it had caused shockingly remained in full view as Israel obstructed the reconstruction of Palestinian homes, vital civilian infrastructure and the numerous United Nations facilities it had damaged or destroyed, including UNRWA schools and the main UNRWA warehouse containing humanitarian supplies. The Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General had found that the strikes against United Nations premises had been intentional and an egregious breach of their inviolability, and that Israel was responsible for the death and injuries caused. In a number of other incidents as well, Israel had been found to have deliberately fired projectiles containing white phosphorous into densely populated civilian areas, including areas where UNRWA premises were situated.

21. Member States must demand that Israel publicly retract its false allegations against UNRWA; and must continue to call for compensation, as recommended by the Board of Inquiry, for the damage or destruction of United Nations property in Gaza. The findings and recommendations of both the Board of Inquiry and the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict demanded follow-up by Member States and the relevant United Nations organs, to ensure that the perpetrators of such serious human rights violations were held accountable for their crimes and ensure justice for the victims. Israel's flagrant impunity must be ended, and international law must prevail.

22. The Israeli military aggression against Gaza had had a serious impact on UNRWA activities, forcing it to suspend movement of personnel, which had adversely affected its humanitarian operations during a time of dire need. Poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment remained rampant among the refugee population, because Israel continued maliciously to obstruct aid intended for the reconstruction and recovery from reaching Gaza. It must lift its blockade and allow suspended United Nations projects to be relaunched.

23. In the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, Israel's ongoing imposition of hundreds of checkpoints, its unlawful construction of settlements and the separation wall, its intensified permit regime and its discriminatory road network continued to deny the refugees access to UNRWA services. Israel's obstruction of UNRWA vehicles, its endangerment of

UNRWA staff and facilities and its levying of taxes and transit charges on the Agency were totally unacceptable and in violation of Israel's obligations under international law. Member States, which were repeatedly called upon to provide emergency funding to remedy the repercussions on the refugees and on UNRWA caused by such gross, systematic Israeli violations, must firmly insist on holding Israel accountable.

24. Throughout the years of conflict, displacement and loss endured by the Palestinian people, UNRWA had remained a constant in the lives of the refugees and played an indispensable role in easing their suffering. The Agency with vital support from the host countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and from the donor community, and despite serious financial constraints, had continued to provide essential assistance. In addition to its extraordinary efforts in Gaza, it was providing emergency assistance to the refugees displaced from the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon and promoting the reconstruction of the camp, and it was seeking to improve living conditions in all the refugee camps. It was now also assisting the Palestinian refugees from Iraq living in Jordan and Syria. While the Agency's programmes focused on education, health, and relief and social services, it had done more than simply help meet basic needs. It had given the refugees, young and old, hope and opportunities for a better future.

25. Her delegation reiterated its deepest gratitude to UNRWA and to all United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations working together to assist the refugees, and to the donor community for its consistent, generous funding of UNRWA, while urging donors to continue strongly supporting the Agency; it urged Member States to respond promptly to the Agency's emergency appeals in 2009 so as to help UNRWA provide desperately needed assistance and maintain the quality of its services. The international community's firm and long-standing support of UNRWA, reflected both a humanitarian commitment to the welfare of the refugees and a political commitment to a just solution for their plight. The Palestinian leadership regarded the refugee question as a core final-status issue and one of the keys to peace. It appealed to the international community to redouble efforts to promote the resumption of an accelerated peace process leading to a settlement of all aspects of the question of Palestine, including justice for the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

26. **Mr. Örnéus** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, Iceland, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union and its member States was the largest UNRWA donor, its contribution having amounted in 2008 to more than 60 per cent of the Agency's regular budget, in addition to its large contributions to special programmes and emergency appeals. Respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, had guided the European Union's policy not only with respect to the conflict between Israel and its neighbours but also regarding support for UNRWA. The European Union stressed the need for positive developments on the ground, leading without delay to a fair, stable and equitable solution to the question of Palestine refugees, within the framework of a comprehensive and final permanent-status agreement, based on the principles of land-for-peace and a two-State solution.

27. The contribution by UNRWA to the human capital of the region was beyond doubt: its record in education was impressive, reaching half a million children in the Middle East while doubling the proportion of female pupils since the 1950s; in the field of health, it had achieved a near 100 per cent vaccination record and ran a health-care programme that provided extensive coverage. In 2009, the Agency had experienced yet another year of tremendous challenges. The European Union condemned the shelling of UNRWA infrastructure in Gaza early in the year and deeply deplored the loss of life during that conflict, particularly the civilian casualties. The humanitarian needs of the Palestine refugees there, compounded by the problem of limited access, continued to be of great concern. Border crossings must be immediately and unconditionally opened to the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. Reconstruction and economic recovery had to be permitted and the current humanitarian crisis must be resolved.

28. The financial problems of UNRWA had been serious for many years and had now become critical. The core budget was chronically underfunded and so

were the emergency appeals. To that could now be added the global financial crisis and negative exchange rates. Yet if additional funding was not forthcoming, there would be far-reaching consequences for UNRWA operations. It was therefore the shared responsibility of all Member States to support UNRWA both politically and financially: it was not sustainable that 90 per cent of resources were provided by 15 countries only. The European Union strongly urged new donors to commit to the work of UNRWA, and existing donors to increase their contributions. A broadened donor base would guarantee a stable agency that could meet the needs of the Palestine refugees and contribute to stability in the region until a final settlement was reached.

29. UNRWA was in the middle of an impressive reform process that represented a serious effort to revitalize its effectiveness, while maintaining the confidence of donors and refugees alike. The European Union strongly supported that endeavour. The Agency should work in close cooperation with the rest of the United Nations family as it proceeded with its reform efforts.

30. The mere existence of UNRWA carried the message to the Palestine refugees that the world had not forgotten them. A comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict was 60 years overdue. The peace process must therefore be renewed, and should result in a fair solution to the refugee issue. In the meantime, the European Union was committed to maintaining a substantial level of humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people. A strong and financially stable UNRWA was in the interest of everyone who believed in human development and peace.

31. **Ms. Hernández Toledano** (Cuba), said that it was unjustifiable that the Palestinian people had been suffering under the long and brutal Israeli occupation of their land since 1967 and continued to be denied fundamental human rights like the right to self-determination and the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their land. The deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was a consequence of the illegal policies and practices of the occupying Power. The construction of the separation wall, in clear violation of international law, was continuing, and the Israeli settlement policy was being intensified. The steps taken unilaterally by Israel jeopardized the prospects for achieving a negotiated settlement based on the two-State solution.

32. The situation of the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip following the brutal attack by Israel the previous December and January was truly alarming. Israel's aggressive and clearly illegal stand had prevented the start of any reconstruction, and poverty levels had risen to the point that 50 per cent of families now lived below the extreme poverty line. Israel continued to severely limit the circulation of Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where refugees were in the majority, and to place restrictions on the movement of goods, including food and medication. Israel must stop imposing closures in the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as they were causing serious socio-economic damage.

33. UNRWA was working under extremely difficult conditions. The restrictions on the circulation of Agency personnel, goods and vehicles had undermined its ability to work and caused it to incur substantial losses. The Committee should consider including a provision in the draft resolution on UNRWA requesting a refund of improper taxation of the Agency by the Israeli authorities. UNRWA was making encouraging progress in improving the management of its services. It should receive all the support and guarantees it needed to carry out its functions. Israel itself must abide by its obligation to protect United Nations premises and the security of UNRWA personnel.

34. Cuba stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people as they sought to establish an independent and sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and it supported the search for a just solution to the question of the refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

35. **Mr. Mashabane** (South Africa) said that UNRWA continued to have relevance since the conditions that had led to its establishment remained unchanged. The full implementation of its activities was, however, impeded by the projected funding gap for 2009 and 2010, which was a matter of serious concern. His delegation supported the General Assembly's call for the institutional strengthening of the Agency to be supported by resources from the regular budget of the United Nations. He urged States to continue to support the world of UNRWA, as his own country had done over the past years.

36. The region's volatile security environment remained a challenge for the Agency's work; he condemned in the strongest terms the destruction of UNRWA facilities by the Israel Defense Forces during their incursion into Gaza, and called on Israel, the occupying Power, to comply fully with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. He further called on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza and to ensure not only the safety of UNRWA personnel but also their unimpeded access to the areas in which they performed their tasks.

37. The humanitarian situation of the people of Palestine and in neighbouring Arab States could be addressed only through a resolution of the political issues within the region. South Africa continued to support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and other initiatives, and looked forward to the day when two States, Palestine and Israel, coexisted in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders.

38. **Mrs. Egger** (Switzerland) said that sufficient funding was a prerequisite to the fulfilment of the Agency's vital mandate, which, as a credible and trustworthy partner, it had implemented in a cost-effective manner, notwithstanding the volatile context of its operations. Her delegation supported the call of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA for the Secretary-General to provide a report on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA at the earliest possible date. Without a remedy to its critical financial situation, however, UNRWA would be forced to further reduce its services to the refugee communities and further staff reductions and deteriorating working conditions would become avoidable, all of which created an obvious risk of tension with and within host countries and also a destabilizing effect on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

39. Switzerland remained deeply concerned about the ongoing severe restrictions on movement in and out of Gaza; humanitarian efforts by UNRWA and other aid agencies were being seriously impeded as a result of the protracted blockade. The swift establishment of independent and impartial mechanisms to guarantee the passage of aid, essential goods and reconstruction materials was therefore critical to improving that situation and promoting economic recovery. To that end, all parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, in conformity with international humanitarian law, and must comply strictly with all their obligations under international law.

40. **Mr. Aldhahri** (United Arab Emirates) said that the extremely difficult humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people was steadily worsening as a result of the severe restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupying forces. Israeli violations also targeted the facilities and services provided by such international institutions as UNRWA, particularly in Gaza, which remained crippled by the ongoing blockade and closures that exacerbated the humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental crisis produced by the mass destruction and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Israeli army during its onslaught against Gaza. The burden of responsibility on UNRWA to provide shelter, health care and other assistance to the thousands of people left homeless and traumatized as a result of those events had also increased. Furthermore, the Israeli aggression had now extended beyond the deliberate destruction of UNRWA facilities to include interference in the movements of its personnel, who were subjected to searches and questioning that led to delays in the delivery of much-needed relief supplies and services to refugees.

41. His Government pledged its continuing political, moral and financial support for UNRWA and urged the strongest international condemnation of all Israeli violations, which blatantly contravened the Charter of the United Nations, as well as international humanitarian law and international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the 1967 Comay-Michelmore agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

42. His Government called on Israel to cease its repeated attacks on Palestine refugee camps and remove all obstacles to the work of UNRWA and the movement of the Agency's personnel. Secondly, it appealed to the international community, in particular the specialized financial and economic institutions, to provide increased financial support to UNRWA and called on donor States to fulfil their pledges for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon; his country had been among the first to fulfil its pledge, in addition to which some of its charitable

institutions had provided support for the establishment of temporary schools and mobile hospitals for the inhabitants of that camp. Thirdly, it re-emphasized the authority vested in UNRWA pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32 (IV) of 1949 and the Agency's commitment to continuing its services to Palestine refugees until such time as a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question was reached, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant United Nations resolutions. Lastly, it re-emphasized the need for UNRWA to work in full coordination with the Palestinian Authority, the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and Arab States hosting refugee camps. The humanitarian efforts made by UNRWA were nothing short of commendable. Ultimately, however, the Palestine refugee problem would be resolved only within the framework of a final solution to the Palestinian question.

43. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that Israel persistently refused to bring an end to the Palestinian tragedy that it had deliberately caused in disregard of United Nations resolutions, with which it habitually failed to comply. Now numbering over 5 million, Palestine refugees constituted the world's largest refugee group, yet in their place Israel brought in settlers from the four corners of the globe to seize their land and homes, heedless of the many international appeals for a halt to its racist settlement policies in the interest of a resumption of negotiations with the Palestinian side on a final solution. Israel sent out daily reminders that it was above international legitimacy, one recent example being its expulsion of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, who had consequently been prevented from carrying out his mission. The Special Rapporteur's earlier report (A/HRC/10/20), dated February 2009, stated that 1 in every 225 Gazans had been killed or injured during the Israeli attacks on Gaza starting in December 2008 and that Israel's launching of those attacks under conditions where it was impossible to distinguish between civilian and military targets would seem to constitute a war crime of the greatest magnitude under international law. In his supplementary oral statement to the Human Rights Council in March 2009, the Special Rapporteur had further contended that Israel's use of modern weaponry and its confinement of Palestinians to the combat zone during its military operations should be treated as a new crime against humanity.

44. The Commissioner-General's report (A/64/13 and Add.1) mentioned further matters of concern, including the ongoing Israeli settlement in the West Bank and construction of the separation barrier; the restrictions on movement of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza; the grave impact of the blockade on all aspects of life in Gaza; and the forcible entry of the Israeli military into the West Bank premises of UNRWA and the damage to the Agency's Gaza premises as a result of Israeli military strikes or shelling, described as intentional in the report of the Board of Inquiry (A/63/855-S/2009/250). Israel, however, not only disregarded such established facts but also refused to pay the reparation claim of US$ 11.2 million for that damage.

45. He noted the positive references in the Commissioner-General's report to the Syrian Arab Republic's efforts in favour of the 500,000 Palestine refugees whom it had received and for whom its assistance in 2008 had amounted to over US$ 160 million. The issue of Palestine refugees was, however, a global responsibility. UNRWA should therefore pursue its mandate until its work was complete, which required a generous increase in donations, a larger donor base and the guaranteed fulfilment of donor pledges. In brief, it was vital to safeguard and support that mandate in order to ensure the return of Palestine refugees to their homes, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

46. **Mr. Al-Tamimi** (Qatar) said that the outstanding work done by UNRWA personnel was all the more commendable in the light of the harassment and direct attacks to which they were subjected by the Israeli authorities, such as the strikes targeted at UNRWA schools. Condemning those strikes, Qatar had requested the Security Council to draw up a plan for the use of schools as safe havens to which humanitarian aid and essential items would be delivered. In that context, he wondered what had become of the recommendations set forth in the report of the Board of Inquiry (A/63/855-S/2009/250), particularly given the Security Council's failure to act on them.

47. The recent Israeli aggression and ongoing blockade against Gaza had led not only to a deterioration in the humanitarian situation of the highly aid-dependent Palestine refugees but also to near economic collapse. The situation elsewhere in the occupied Palestinian Territories had similarly worsened

owing to the restrictions on movement and goods, not to mention the other Israeli practices in violation of international law, in particular international humanitarian law. UNRWA was nonetheless inadequately funded to enable the full implementation of projects vital to assisting the growing number of Palestine refugees registered with it. He therefore called for an increase in the donations without which UNRWA would be unable to deliver its services. Qatar had spared no effort in offering material and other assistance for the benefit of Palestine refugees and had also established the Gaza Fund, in addition to the Fakhura campaign for the benefit of the Palestinian people, whose ordeal on account of the Israeli occupation and its attendant practices persisted. Until the Palestine refugee problem was ended by a fair and just settlement of Palestinian question, UNRWA would continue to play an indispensable role in an issue that extended beyond the humanitarian sphere to affect the stability of the entire region.

48. **Mr. Løvold** (Norway) said that the Palestine refugee population, which had already more than quadrupled during the 60 years of existence of UNRWA, would continue to grow as long as the final status issue of the right of return remained unresolved. UNRWA and its services were therefore unfortunately more relevant than ever and would still be needed for a transitional period of up to 15 years in the event that a meaningful peace process was established and the refugee issue was resolved. Notwithstanding the steady increase in the demand for UNRWA services, however, the volume of funding had barely changed, which had led to the worrying financial instability now affecting the UNRWA budget. During its recent chairmanship of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, Norway had successfully launched a number of initiatives to secure funding from a broader donor base. Projections for the coming years were nevertheless unpromising. Without a permanent solution to the UNRWA funding issue, the same urgent problem and ad hoc response would recur annually.

49. A first step towards a solution would be to enhance the resource base by seeking additional regular contributions from new donors, bearing in mind that 90 per cent of contributions to the UNRWA General Fund were currently provided by only 15 Member States, each of which had reached its limit. He called for the involvement of the G-20 members and also called on Arab States to honour their pledge of a contribution amounting to not less than 7.7 per cent of the General Fund. The next step would be to ensure that a greater share of UNRWA funding came from the regular budget of the United Nations, which would offer the advantages of greater predictability and more equitable burden-sharing and was essential to the satisfactory provision of services by UNRWA, which was a beacon of hope and a key peacebuilding element in the Middle East.

50. **Mr. Hoang Chi Trung** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation shared the concerns about the funding difficulties of UNRWA. The international donor community must mobilize its resources and redouble its efforts to support the Agency's operations. His delegation supported the efforts to reform the Agency in order to enhance its effectiveness in delivering services to Palestine refugees. His Government was gravely concerned about the loss of life and the dire humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which, together with the deepening socio-economic crisis, caused further hardships for millions of desperate and traumatized Palestinians. The responsibility of the international community to join in resolving that crisis had therefore never been greater.

51. The separation barrier and the Israeli-imposed closures, curfews and other restrictions on movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were hindering the ability of UNRWA to carry out its mandated tasks; his Government called upon Israel to ensure the safety of UNRWA personnel and facilitate their difficult tasks in support of Palestine refugees by eliminating all obstacles without delay. In so doing, it must also fully respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA as a United Nations body. Israel's serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law during the Gaza conflict, as reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission, were deeply disturbing. It was imperative for all parties concerned to stop all acts of violence and comply strictly with international humanitarian and human rights law, while ensuring the safety and security of civilians, diplomatic and United Nations premises and personnel. It was also imperative that investigations be conducted to bring early justice to the victims. Those steps would contribute significantly to the efforts to resume the Middle East peace process.

52. **Mr. Al-Allaf** (Jordan) said that the proven emergency response capacity of UNRWA and the heroic relief efforts by its staff during the Israeli

military offensive had played an effective role in alleviating the suffering of the inhabitants of Gaza; that suffering nevertheless continued, constituting a humanitarian disaster that would only worsen with the coming of winter. The women and children of Gaza were more than ever in urgent need of international support. Immediate action should therefore be taken to remove the blockade and open crossings to essential supplies and construction materials.

53. For its part, Jordan would continue to offer all forms of support to the Palestinians and to draw attention in international forums to their plight. It was extremely concerned by the closures, curfews and other Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which impeded not only economic development and employment but also the ability of UNRWA and its staff to perform their mandated tasks. It therefore called on Israel to remove those restrictions.

54. UNRWA had been remarkably effective and successful during its 60 years of operation and Jordan fully supported its work. His Government appealed to all donors, without exception, for the financial assistance needed to ensure that the Agency's services to Palestine refugees continued undiminished. Indeed, any attempt to curtail the role and responsibilities of UNRWA or alter its mandate must be rejected. With its limited resources stretched by the economic burdens placed on it as host to the largest number of refugees, Jordan counted on the assistance of UNRWA and opposed any reduction in funding for UNRWA programmes in its territory. It also rejected any solution to the Palestine refugee issue that did not guarantee the right of return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Emphasizing Israel's historical responsibility for the existence and continuation of that issue, he said that host States should be compensated for the true costs incurred by them in that capacity. Lastly, every possible effort should be made to achieve the two-State solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and establish a comprehensive peace on the basis of the adopted terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

55. **Mr. AlHarthy** (Saudi Arabia) expressed the hope that UNRWA would build on its commendable work of the past 60 years by continuing to provide its programmes and services to all Palestine refugees. To that end, the international community, in particular its donor members, should increase their contributions to UNRWA with a view to the recruitment of more staff, the expansion of facilities and the elimination of financial and budgetary problems. The arbitrary and repressive practices of the Israeli authorities, including curfews, closures, the separation wall in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, had increased the suffering of the population and gravely affected all aspects of life in the occupied territories. In their recent onslaught against Gaza, the Israeli occupying forces had destroyed UNRWA schools and health centres in disregard of the Agency's humanitarian role, killing its personnel and flouting all international instruments that affirmed the importance of the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel, particularly in conflict zones.

56. Saudi Arabia strongly condemned the blockade against Gaza and called for its immediate lifting, as well as for a halt to all restrictions imposed on international organizations by Israel and the demolition of the separation wall, which had been deemed illegitimate in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolutions. Israel must also compensate UNRWA in full for all the damage caused to its property and premises. Furthermore, it was bound under the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure the safe delivery of food, medical supplies and other goods in order to meet the humanitarian needs of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip without any restrictions or conditions.

57. Saudi Arabia supported humanitarian causes not only at the governmental level, but also at the grass-roots level, as evidenced by its top-ranking position in terms of voluntary contributions to humanitarian relief operations in 2008. Between 2002 and 2009, it had also supported the budgets of the Palestinian Authority and of UNRWA to the tune of almost US$ 735 million, allocated US$ 200 million to projects under consideration by the Al-Aqsa Fund and contributed US$ 25 million to the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon. It was committed to the full payment of its annual contributions to UNRWA in support of the Agency's humanitarian objectives and its work to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people until they returned to their land and were granted fair compensation for damages, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Financial support was not, however, the sole solution to the refugee problem; political support, especially from the international community, was another crucial factor.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.